

The path to digital revolution for businesses in SA

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Adopting and adapting to digital is more important now than ever before. In order to remain competitive and relevant in your industry, it's crucial for you to begin and progress your brands' transition to digital transformation.



Reynhardt Uys, group chief experience officer at Immersion Group

With digital disruptors rapidly coming into the fold, success will come to those that ensure their workforce is skilled in the best practices of the digital age. This transformation must be engrained within the company and advocated by leadership to have maximum impact.

The concern for many businesses is that they've already fallen behind, and some even think they're too late to get started. Digital speed is as much as five times faster than a traditional business, and that pace is essential to getting ahead in your industry.

So we know there is a need to adapt to new ways that digital is changing business, but we also know this change is easier said than done. Developing a digital-first strategy is difficult, especially in an industry that can be very traditional. But with the right synergy of professionals, resources and research, brands will begin achieving their experience and digital transformation goals.

With the current challenges facing brand customer experiences today, future-trends and new-age solutions will see some of these brands placing CX and UX at the centre of their business goals.

Reynhardt Uys, group chief experience officer at Immersion Group, shares insight into adopting and adapting to the way the digital revolution is changing business.

■ **How can we define digital transformation?**

Digital transformation is more than just integrating the latest piece of tech into one of your processes. It's about true digital transformation that is integrated into all areas of the business.

From a fundamental level, all the way to the top C-level decision-makers and sponsors – digital transformation is about taking the tech landscape and building a system where you are rethinking your entire business model based on your new and enhanced focus of digitally leading your brand through leadership, new emerging technologies and embracing change to enhance business performance and ultimately strengthening your relationships between your customers and employees.

Digital transformation is about becoming a rapidly innovating and changing organisation with the ability to successfully manage that change and new ways of work to transform your businesses and align with the Fourth Industrial Revolution.



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This means that you're forced to disrupt and shift services from manual only to online – but at the same time, rebuild your business culture, redesign products to be digital-first, allow marketing and sales to leverage digital, and add new capabilities into your environment in order to maximise on what the 4th industrial revolution offers.

“ Digital transformation is all about fundamentally changing how you operate and deliver value to your customers while also introducing a culture change which requires organisations to challenge their environments and experiment with new ideas and concepts. It's about shifting business models from a digital-afterthought to one where digital is a lead business unit that drives cultural and tech change in delivering a brand new customer experience that is engineered through this environment and delivered by this new transformation. ”

■ **In your opinion, how well are South African businesses adapting to digital transformation?**

South African businesses are beginning to understand that this new way of thinking can actually fit into their business models, they can be technology-led and human-centred.



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We're finding that a lot of hardcore tech solutions are being bought into only because they're trending, like chatbots or AI – but on implementation, we're seeing that local businesses aren't yet sure what to do with this new tech or how to use it effectively.

As a result, they're seeing no value in these quick-solution products, further diminishing any vision or future value proposition for other digital opportunities.

It's becoming popular to chase digital and transformation programmes but this new change isn't only a digital transformation change, it's a holistic business change from a fundamental level straight through to delivery and customer relationships. Using tech like chatbots or AI doesn't mean you've fully embraced transformation.

“ True transformation is when a business massively implements change and innovation, positively impacting their customers and employees lives from the very bottom level to the top CEO level. ”

More and more CEO and C-Level executives are welcoming digital transformation in the truest sense, embracing business and culture change as a whole.

Full transformation is a large scale effort and while there has been a lot of good digital adoption, full transformation is still lagging – and will still lag until businesses, at every level, start embracing full organisational transformation from accounting to marketing and sales, to design and delivery.

🔴 **What are the key principles to ensure successful digital transformation in the workplace?**

First, the idea that you'll build it and they will come – is absolutely false.

In order to embrace this new way of thinking it's crucial that digital transformation is supported by organisation transformation and to understand that this isn't just a quick programme, it's a new way of thinking and new way of work that will evolve as your business grows.



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Digital design should be a continuous function, not projects to implement new tech or features in isolation, and it needs to be funded centrally as a business goal, and not in separate silos.

The employee experience is also a crucial component of digital transformation and without the necessary culture change, any efforts to achieve digital transformation will be hindered, resulting in the business failing to see the true value in what you're trying to achieve.

“ Customer experience is central to the achievement and success of digital transformation. Without a deep understanding of who your customers are, and commitment to them, you cannot develop a successful strategy to deliver on their expectations. ”

🔴 **Digital transformation is, of course, impossible without the right tools. What tools are needed to adapt?**

There are many toolsets that will need to evolve as your journey into digital transformation.

The first set being your collaboration and communication tool kits that will enable you to work in digital environments. These new tools will allow you to be more digital and assist in rebuilding your customer platforms from digital sales, servicing, communication and engagement.

All the operational tools in your business will need to be rebuilt in order to drive digital transformation with your employee-

facing tools being your collaborative tools and data systems, and your customer-facing tools being your delivery platforms and design systems.

You'll need to develop all of these new tools to be digital-first and to develop a consistent omnichannel experience.

Your entire marketing landscape will need to be re-engineered in order to change and evolve your communication strategies, and manage the entire customer journey from end-to-end. You'll need new measurement tools to measure success quickly, and rapidly take action to learn and change as you go – an example is A/B testing in a live environment and being able to make and implement changes immediately.

You'll also need to think about cloud infrastructures to support digital transformation. For example, your data management tools, and digital-first processes and structures.

To embrace digital transformation, you'll need to expect that a lot of toolsets will need to change.

🔴 ***What guidelines do you have in developing a digital transformation strategy?***

Don't worry about the technical aspects, embrace total change. If not, you'll only change one of the problems your customer may be facing and then only see a small part of the transformation.

Make sure that you have ownership, leadership and sponsorship driven from the very top of the organisation – and that you give the strategy what it needs to succeed. It must exist in your financial statements, if it's not driven from the top level, then it won't succeed.

Digital transformation cannot only be one piece of the business, it needs to work with the entire organisation as its own unit. Digital transformation needs to be there to support a clearly defined customer experience transformation strategy – if they aren't linked, it won't work.

The strategy needs to not only cover what tech changes you're wanting to make but also the organisational structure and target model changes that need to be done in order to ensure success. So it needs a clear action plan – not just intent and needs to target enablement, platform re-engineering, and the building of new capabilities including digital marketing and measurement.



What are the key investment drivers for digital transformation?

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The strategy also needs to clearly define how it will generate and value for the organisation, targeting high-value wins in order to win sponsorship and add value to the strategy and the business, to prove the hypothesis of your strategy.

You're going to need a lot of collaboration across the business, best practice trends in your environment and your strategy will need to be driven by the experience you're trying to generate for your customer and employees. It needs to be tested to prove there is worth in your strategy and you need to bring IT and other business units in, to share KPIs and ensure that all business units are working toward the same shared goal.

Lastly, work with partners who have done this before. Make sure that your initial leadership in this phase is passionate about building digital CX and the processes required – and are willing and capable of championing and driving these changes throughout the organisation.

🔴 ***What trends will we be seeing surrounding digital transformation in 2020?***

We're in a very exciting phase of digital transformation in South Africa. South Africans are looking to online digital platforms to meet just about every need, and how prepared brands are for digital transformation will benchmark their customer's brand loyalty and the success of the business digital strategy.

We're going to see more businesses adopting full digital transformation within their organisation, both internally and externally.

With the much-anticipated release of 5G across the globe, we'll see a rapid increase in speed with "smart" developments in industries like manufacturing, bringing considerably faster connection and wireless internet speeds. Businesses will need to make sure their online digital platforms and experiences meet the speed customers are going to expect from them.

We're also going to see data analytics take centre stage becoming crucial in the digital strategy. Without the use of advanced analytics to accurately identify problems, opportunities, and solutions, businesses will fall behind. We're going to see organisations take this new approach to measuring and defining internal organisational capabilities to refine their search for successful transformative solutions that suit their needs.

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